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A Circle For Catharsis

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Introduction

One of my near and dear once spent an hour in a therapist's office kicking an innocent throw pillow around the room and screaming out rage at his abusive father. At the end of the hour, he had a broken foot - and the first beginnings of a healed mind.

But we have learned that magic works through symbols. Calling an object by your abuser's name and then abusing that object is sympathetic magic used for the purpose of cursing. To throw a curse is to project one's worst feelings out into the world of form, and to invoke upon oneself the inevitable karmic feedback.

It is not our way to blast the crops and sour the milk. Wiccan tradition and plain common sense both tell us to avoid the practice of baneful magic. But, as usual, it's not quite as easy as just saying no.

Rape and child abuse, loved ones killed by muggers or drunk drivers, emotional manipulation and betrayal, economic exploitation and dishonest office politics - people hurt and victimize other people in many different ways every day. We are not immune.

At some point in our lives, probably every single one of us will feel violated by some other human being. Often our feelings will be based in fact. Whether they are or not, however, we need and deserve a safe way to discharge them.

Symbolic baneful actions are also cathartic actions. They drain and clear our poisonous feelings and allow our own emotional healing to begin. If we deny ourselves this outlet, what happens to the grief and pain and rage?

If projection is bad for us, introjection is even worse. Unreleased bad feelings are a major source of stress. In a very real sense, stress cripples and kills. Ulcers, strokes, heart attacks and more are all heavily stress-related. A simple refusal to engage in baneful magic could easily amount to punishing a victim by adding serious illness to the original harm.

I am part of the All. "An it harm none" is about me too. Release of my feelings is my right.

At first it seems like an insoluble paradox. But the same understanding of magic that forbids projection of our bad feelings can open a safe channel for those feelings. Here's one possible form:

Preparation

Understanding

Think about the Alcoholics Anonymous prayer. "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can change, and the wisdom to know the difference." People of any religion can recognize the wisdom in those words. This ritual is intended to ease emotional pressure. I believe that is a step towards granting all three of those things to ourselves.

If your hurt is ongoing, you must take steps to stop it - leave the abusive relationship, begin searching for a new job, begin organizing politically to stop your oppression. What good this Circle does you will be temporary at best if you are not acting on both the magical and material planes to change the things you can change.

But some of our pain comes from old, old injuries. And some of our feelings are not based on fact at all. The source of those hurts cannot be changed, but the pain can be. This particular working is to release any bad feelings, not to judge them.

Don't worry about justice. You may be mistaken about who has hurt you, but nobody will be hurt by what we do here. All energy will be contained within the Circle. The object of this working is healing, not justice. You deserve this healing simply because you hurt, and even if you are mistaken.

Prevention and healing are human tasks; to do them is to change the things we can change. Justice - the evening of karmic balances - is the business of the Gods, and may take place across a span of many lifetimes. Karmic balance is a thing we cannot change.

Set Up

You have some decisions to make. The first one is whether you will work alone or ask one or more trusted friends to witness and facilitate your working. Some of us can only let our feelings go in strict privacy. For others, the presence of people who will make sure we don't hurt ourselves or our homes removes a source of inhibition. And sometimes simply being heard is part of the release process.

Next, exactly what kind of symbolic action will release your feelings? Will kicking a throw pillow suffice, or do you need to actually make a poppet? Or just screaming may be enough. If you want to work with a physical symbol, prepare it in advance, and be sure not to use anything you will want to keep after the rite or ever use again.

Figure out whether you can either cast a Circle to include your bathroom, or leave a cast Circle for a period of time. This will depend on your particular training. If possible, have a warm scented tub waiting for you. If not, a basin of warm scented water and a washcloth within easy reach just outside of your Circle will suffice. Also, a ritual meal should be prepared and waiting outside of Circle, and this should include something green and growing - I favor sprouts - and something sweet.

Procedure

1. Waning moon is a good time for this Circle, and the Dark of the Moon is even better. Cast the Circle and invoke the Watchers in your usual manner. Call on the Crone, on She who weeds and prunes and disposes of the obstructive and unnecessary.
2. Just inside the Circle, like the membrane in an eggshell, cast a grounding shield. One possible image for this shield would be a black absorptive chain link fence, supported at regular intervals by fence posts that are lightning rods. Whatever happens within this space will be contained and grounded.
3. Make clear to yourself what wound you seek to drain. Say it out loud, even if you are alone. Recall what happened to you in detail and let the feelings grow strong.
4. Now, let go of your feelings. Do whatever will help you release what is in you. Beat on a pillow or rip up a doll. Scream till you cry. Don't stop till you are emptied. Then fling the thing you used as a symbol out of your Circle.

5. When you are sure you are all done, all drained, contract the shield into a tight ball in the center of the Circle. As it contracts, it will gather all the negative energy from the Circle. Ground it. Affirm that you are sending this energy to the fire at the heart of the Earth - to Jarnsaxe or to Pele - to be purified in that blast furnace and cycled to wherever strong energy is needed. Know that what you now let go is gone. Affirm this out loud.
6. Wash or bathe in a ritual manner, feeling the last traces of your bad feelings dissolve away. If others are present, allow them to wash and serve you.
7. Rest a few minutes. Feel the peace of emptiness.
8. Then invoke the Maiden's energy for new beginnings. Have your ritual feast, and otherwise indulge your senses. Gentle and joyful music would be effective, and you may want to switch to a sweeter smelling incense. This is a time to dream dreams and plan plans. You have removed an energy drain from your life, now you will be able to?
9. Thank and dismiss whatever Beings you have called on, throughout the whole ritual. Close your Circle as usual. Do not do any other kinds of working or worship within this particular Circle.

Follow Through

The final part of any effective magical working is "acting in accordance" on the material plane. By doing this, we give the magic a channel through which to manifest. For this working, there are three forms of follow through, and all are important.

1. Remember that painful feelings are partly habitual. Acting in accordance with magic to banish such feelings requires you to stop feeding the habit. Don't talk about the pain with anybody until at least the second full moon after the working. This gives the habit a chance to fade out. As much as you can, eliminate the topic from your internal dialogue as well. When you notice yourself dwelling on the old pain, gently and firmly change the subject.
2. Thinking about action to change your life in the here and now is perfectly OK. The problem is reiteration of old feelings of frustration and helplessness that actually impede change.
3. If the hurtful situation is current and ongoing, continue with any steps you were taking to change the things you can change. In fact, you will probably find you have more energy than you did before to devote to your projects.
4. Be sure to use some of your newly freed emotional energy to reward yourself. Take time for friendship, love, and pleasure. The object of the exercise is to clear space for the enjoyment of life, so start right now.

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HPs, Proteus Coven

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